

## **Torrey Continues to Dance**

Torrey has one of the oldest continuously used open-air dance hall in Utah. Those of us who love Torrey think it may be the one and only left. For those of you who have never calmed your psyche in Torrey (no cell phone reception), warm desert days, and cool evening breezes, that's okay, Torrey tourists and regulars would rather you not find this town. If you've been to Capitol Reef National Park, you might have dismissed it as another little sleepy town without a grocery store or Wal-Mart. However, it has a unique story and I think your viewers would be very interested.

The citizens of Torrey needed a meeting place. After much discussion, Janet Hansen, ask the Lee Family, whose father opened the Big Apple in 1931, if they would lease the "Big Apple" to the city. The "Big Apple" was the community-meeting place for most of Wayne County before the phone lines came in 1946. The Lee family agreed to lease the property for \$1. The Utah Arts Council gave the city a grant for \$10,000, but the property needed cement taken away, a fence, electrical boxes, a band stand, a new ticket booth, benches, etc. The citizens of Torrey showed their stuff. Donations, materials (including cement) and volunteer labor totaling more than \$30,000 were promised. When the time came to get the job done, the project was completed in less than a month and just in time for the Annual Torrey Apple Days 4th of July Celebrations (see attached schedule of events).

There are still places in this world where communities work together to be together.

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## **Torrey Polishes the "Big Apple"**

The newly refurbished, yes, as in renovated "Big Apple" is the gathering place for the 2007's Torrey's Apple Days 4th of July Celebrations. Thanks to a \$10,000 Utah Arts Council Grant written by Janet Hansen, the longest continuously used open-air ballroom now is in the care of the city of Torrey. Thanks to a combination of funds from the grant, a generous lease provided by the Lee Family (Mack Lee, Coral Lee Coffey, Mary Jean Lee Harmon), and the good will of the people of Torrey. The town now has the opportunity to preserve the place where an entire county meets, greets, shares, sings, dances, and many times falls in love.

Originally built in 1931 on Dewendon Lee's land, it was a joint venture between Lee and his partner June Covington. The "Big Apple" scheduled boxing events using local talent and the young men from the Civilian Conservation Core (CCC) stationed in Boulder, Utah. The reigning Champion was J. Alton Balli, the State Middle Weight from neighboring Fremont, Utah, who later became a teacher at Wayne County High School.

The lack of a worthy opponent for Balli forced Lee and Covington to reinvent the use of the "Big Apple." They started hosting dances highlighting the talent of local bands. Among the some of the headliners were Sam and Perk, whose logo was "Swing and Jerk with Sam and Perk." Preparation for the dances included shaved bars of wax mixed with cornmeal. This mixture was swept into the concrete floor to make it slick for the dancers.

The "Big Apple" continued to be the meeting place for the county and Torrey. Telephones didn't arrive until 1946. Courting was made easier during the "Big Apple" dances. Boyd Black, wooed his wife

Catherine at the dances. He said "She said, Why don't hold me a little closer so I can follow you better." He added, "And she followed me for 58 years."

Even after the telephones arrived, the "Big Apple" still is used for dances and art exhibits, craft shows, and community gatherings. The shine on its concrete floor lost its luster and was cracked and buckled and electricity was needed for today's bands and events. So, when the town heard about the lease and the grant more than \$30,000 in matching donations of materials and volunteer labor was generated. The new "Big Apple" has electrical boxes, a raised bandstand complete with stone fascia and red stone apples, and benches and a newly sodded grass area. The band continues to play on in Torrey, and in this world of constant change, one-thing remains the same, Torrey still gathers at the "Big Apple."

The "Big Apple" is renovated thanks to the generous donations of money, materials, and volunteer time from the following contributors and individuals who coordinated this project:

Utah Arts Council  
Adus Dorsey  
Lee Family  
Janet Hansen  
State Stone  
Tom Hunt  
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Lorraine Phillips  
Fast Pass People  
Jan Stringham  
Torrey Apple Days Committee  
Torrey Town Park Fund  
Torrey School House Bed & Breakfast

### **Torrey's Apple Days 4th of July Celebrations Schedule**

Friday, June 29 – 9 p.m. - ?  
Dance at the Big Apple – Switchback

Saturday, June 30- 7-9a.m.

Scout Breakfast

7:30 a.m. registration 5K Run/Walk for Big Apple

8 a.m. run begins

8 a.m. Swap Meet begins on Main Street

10 a.m.-3p.m. High Country Quilters Exhibit and Raffle, Daughters of the Utah Pioneers Bldg.

Main St

10 a.m. Parade down Main Street

Children Games following Parade in the Park

1:30 p.m. – Patriotic Program in Torrey Ward House